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ABSTRACT

In this assessment of the status of economic education in North Dakota, where less than 5% of high school students are exposed to a formal course in economics, three things were evaluated: 1) the economic preparation of high school teachers of economics; 2) economic preparation of high school teachers of Problems of Democracy (POD); and, 3) the role of the institutions of higher learning in preparing economics teachers. The results of the first evaluation indicated that the tendency in teacher preparation is in the direction of the minimal state requirements (5 semester hours). In North Dakota all high schools that do not offer a course in economics must offer POD. Better than one-third of the teachers of POD were found to have no economics background. In evaluating economic education by colleges and universities, four subject areas (social studies, home economics, business education, and history) were chosen on the presumption that economics, if taught at all, would most likely be included there. Each reporting college institution graduated approximately 65-80 teachers in the area of social studies. In only 50% of the cases was a minimal background (6-9 hours) in economics required. In the other subject areas, the level of training appears even less. Efforts of the Joint Council, and the North Dakota Council must be relied upon to upgrade the status of economic education in North Dakota. (Author/JLB)

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THE STATUS OF ECONOMICS EDUCATION IN NORTH DAKOTA

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INTRODUCTION

A task force set up in 1961 by the Committee for Economic Development and the American Economic Association revealed that "American high schools produce economic illiterates."[1] Studies undertaken since that time have largely substantiated this 'claim'. A nation wide survey undertaken by George Dawson in 1967 states that only two out of every nine social studies teachers have completed six credit hours in economics.[2] Although social studies and business education teachers are more likely to teach economics, only 22 states require any formal economics preparation of these teacher trainees, and only one half of the nation's 60,000 social studies teachers have had any formal training in the subject.[3]

A few such studies have also been developed in several states and these have largely indicated similar results.[4] In many states, however, no studies have as yet been undertaken. Such is the case for North Dakota.

The purpose of this study is to assess the status of Economic Education in North Dakota. This is to be accomplished by (1) evaluating the economic preparation of teachers of economics in North Dakota High Schools, (2) evaluating the economics preparation of teachers of Problems of Democracy (POD) in North Dakota High Schools, and (3) assessing the role of the institutions of higher learning in North Dakota in preparing teachers in economics.

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[1]Should High Schools Teach Economics?, Business Week, Oct. 7, 1961

[2]George G. Dawson, Nation Wide Survey on the Economic Education of Teacher Trainees, Center for Economic Education, N.Y.U., 1967, p. 1.

[3]Ibid p.1.

[4]See bibliography.

The information relevant to this study was obtained through the cooperation of the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction and also through questionnaires sent to colleges and universities throughout the state.

The Formal Course in Economics

Many secondary schools throughout the nation now offer a formal course in their curriculum entitled Economics. Although the orientation and the context of this course varies significantly, most such courses emulate, to a considerable degree, the first year college course, teaching it essentially as a social science. In North Dakota 53 schools indicated during the academic year 1968-69 that a formal course in economics was offered. Further research indicated that during the year 1970-71, there were actually only 40 schools which offered such a course. Since there are 282 high schools in the state, this means that a course in economics was offered by approximately 14 per cent of all high schools. According to statistics accumulated by the State Department of Public Instruction, there were 2,305 students who completed the formal course entitled Economics. This constitutes approximately 4.6 per cent of the total student population.

Seemingly this is not a particularly enviable record; however, such information does shed light on the relative position of North Dakota vis-a-vis other states. Although data in this regard are scant, Table 1 indicates sufficient information to gain some perspective on the relative position of North Dakota in this regard.

It is difficult to make an accurate assessment of the present day situation in view of the inconsistency of the time periods involved.

TABLE 1

High Schools Offering Economics and Student Population Enrolled, Selected States, Variable Years

State	(1) Schools (% of total)	(2) Students (% of total)
New York (1966-67)	70-75%	N.A.
New Jersey (1962-63)	60%	7.8%
Ohio (1964-65)	60%	5.9%
South Dakota (1965-66)	55%	7.6%
Texas (1966-67)	53%	N.A.
Michigan (1963-64)	53%	N.A.
Arkansas (1966-67)	27%	2.2%
Nebraska (1964-65)	25%	N.A.
Oregon (1968-69)	22%	2.0%
Idaho (1961-62)	20%	5.0%
North Dakota (1970-71)	14%	4.6%
Oklahoma (1961-62)	13%	2.5%

Clearly, however, North Dakota is not doing well in relation to the other states and, concerning Column 1, most noticeably is well behind its closest neighbor to the south.

It is important to note that these percentage figures may be slightly misleading in that school consolidation efforts logically can influence the results. For example, a state with a strong consolidation effort, and thereby a smaller absolute number of schools, can be made to look relatively good in Column 1. Contrariwise, those states with a large absolute number of high schools relative to population show up less favorably.

Column 2, which measures the percentage of student enrollment, may be more meaningful. In this column it is revealed that North Dakota is performing approximately as well as most other states , although again ranks significantly behind South Dakota. In any event, the percentage of students being exposed to a formal course in economics is certainly very low.[5]

Teacher Preparation

Beyond a consideration of the quantity of economics courses being offered is the important aspect of quality. Since many schools attempt to broaden their curriculum as much as possible, many instructors are asked to teach a number of different courses. In a number of instances the background and subject matter preparation of these instructors may not be adequate.

Before a formal course in economics can be offered, minimal state standards must be met. In North Dakota, this means the instructor must have completed at least five semester hours in the discipline of economics. This is truly minimal as it does not even require the typical six-hour sequence in economic principles. The question is, how much better than the minimal state requirements is teacher preparation in the field of economics?

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[5]This does not imply that students need to be enrolled in a "formal" course in economics to be exposed to economic concepts. However, as we shall see later, the probability of a given student being exposed to economics in other social studies courses proves to be almost negligible.

Some Empirical Results:

The backgrounds of all teachers of the formal course in economics in North Dakota were evaluated as to academic preparation. In four cases, adequate information was not available; hence, information was obtained for 36 teachers. The resultant data are summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Economics Preparation of Teachers of Economics
in North Dakota High Schools, 1970

(1) No. of Credits (Semester Hours)	(2) Teachers		(3) Cumulative Per Cent of Teachers
	Number	Per Cent	
0	0	0	0
1-3	3	8.5	100.0
4-6	16	44.4	91.5
7-9	9	25.0	47.1
10-12	2	5.5	22.1
13 or more	6	16.6	16.6

SOURCE: Adapted from James Cicarelli, "Economic Education in Oregon Public Schools," Oregon State Council on Economic Education, 1969.

Generally, the tendency of teacher preparation is in the direction of the minimal state requirements. For example, according to Column 2, better than 40 per cent of the teachers completed from 4-6 credit hours in economics. Some teachers were not even complying with state standards. Six teachers, or less than 20 per cent, have completed more than four courses. Column 3 indicates that, whereas better than 90 per cent complied with state standards, less than one-fifth showed adequate preparation.

This points out an important reason why economic concepts have generally been left out of the high school curriculum. Very simply, most high schools do not have faculty with adequate backgrounds to teach economics. Recent studies have shown that a conceptual understanding of economics occurs somewhere beyond the first year (typically six hours) sequence.[6] In North Dakota less than one-half of the teachers of economics have completed better than six hours in this discipline.[7]

It would again be useful to assess North Dakota's position relative to other states. Table 3 compares the preparation of economics teachers,

TABLE 3

A Comparison of Academic Backgrounds
of Economics Teachers, Selected States

State	(1) Average Semester Hours of Credit	(2) Percentage of Teachers with Either Minor or Major in Economics
New Jersey (1962-63)	12 hours	43%
Ohio (1964-65)	12-13	23%
Oklahoma (1961-62)	12-13	N.A.
Oregon (1968-69)	9-10	38%
Idaho (1964-65)	12	N.A.
North Dakota (1965-66)	10	19%
Arkansas (1966-67)	8	N.A.
South Dakota (1965-66)	8	N.A.

[6]G. L. Bach and Phillip Saunders, "Lasting Effects of Economics Courses at Different Types of Institutions," American Economic Review, LVI (June, 1966), pp. 505-511.

[7]In addition to this, it was discovered that many teachers completed five or six hours of credit in economic history or economic geography. Conceivably these may have been high in economic content.

according to average hours of credit, in eight other states. Although information is not complete, the data in Column 1 indicate that the average economics preparation of North Dakota teachers is not dissimilar from other states. In fact, each of the states considered is in approximately the same position.

Of course, the average preparation may not be an accurate picture of the overall situation for any given state. That is, a small number of teachers with very strong backgrounds in economics can considerably influence the result. Although the author is not aware of the effect of this phenomenon on the data of other states, it was very significant in the case of North Dakota since there were five teachers with exceptionally strong backgrounds. This created what is really a distorted picture of the background of the average teacher.

Column 2 which shows for some states the percentage of teachers with an adequate background in economics (i.e., a major or minor preparation) is perhaps more revealing. In this case, North Dakota was discovered to be the lowest at less than 20 per cent. In other words, all other states for which data are available maintained a higher percentage of adequately prepared teachers. This is true even though the data for all other states is older than that for North Dakota.

As previously indicated, less than five per cent of North Dakota high school students are exposed to a formal course in economics. Tables 2 and 3 seem to indicate that the quality of this minimal exposure is often very questionable.

A logical question at this point involves the teaching of economic concepts in other courses; that is, if economics is not formally taught, is

it included in another social studies or social science course (or courses), and if so, what is the corresponding quality of instruction?

The Course in "Problems of Democracy"

In North Dakota all high schools that do not offer a course in economics must offer a course entitled Problems of Democracy. This course is intended to be an interdisciplinary approach to the social sciences (studies), including government, sociology, and economics. The intent is to spend approximately one-third of the course time in each subject area, although the approach may be interdisciplinary. It may also have either a social studies or social science focus, depending upon the interest of the instructor and/or the curriculum materials used.

Teacher Preparation

The minimal state requirements for teachers of Problems of Democracy are five semester hours in a combination of economics, government, and sociology. Preparation in any two of these disciplines qualifies the instructor to teach the course. Effectively, this means that any given instructor can teach this course without any formal background in economics.

Some Empirical Results:

In order to examine the economics background of teachers of Problems of Democracy, the transcripts of a sample of 106 teachers (other than those teaching economics) were evaluated. Complete data were available for 83 of these or better than one-third of the remaining high schools in the state. An effort was made to include all the larger high schools since it was assumed that these would likely have the more qualified faculty. Hence, if

this sample is biased, it will most likely give the most complementary picture of teacher preparation in economics. The data in Table 4 summarize the results of this sample.

TABLE 4

Economic Preparation of Teachers of Problems of Democracy in North Dakota, Selected High Schools, 1970

(1)	(2) Teacher		(3)
Number of Credits	Number	Per Cent	Cumulative Percentage of Teachers
0	28	33.9	100.0
1-3	21	25.3	66.1
4-6	20	24.0	40.8
7-9	5	6.0	16.8
10-12	3	3.6	10.8
13 or more	6	7.2	7.2

The largest number of teachers, or better than one-third of the sample, had no economics background. Correspondingly, the larger the credit hours involved, the smaller the number of teachers becomes. From Column 3, approximately two-thirds have three or fewer hours of preparation in economics. On the bright side there were six teachers with either minor or major preparations in economics. These, however, constituted less than 10 per cent of the sample. In short, and as expected, the preparation of teachers of Problems of Democracy is significantly less than that of those teachers involved with the formal course in economics. Generally, teachers of Problems of Democracy displayed the strongest background in government

or political science, as the case may be. It is likely that the course content also expressed this focus rather than economics.

Although economics has rarely been on the "most popular list of courses" at any college or university, there are in all probability more deep-seated reasons why the background of high school teachers in economics is so abysmally poor. The quality of the teachers of the state will only be as good as the institutions educating the teachers. The role of colleges and universities in North Dakota in educating teachers of economics or closely related subject areas is subsequently in need of examination.

Economics Education by Colleges and Universities

Educating students in economics is no less a problem at the college and university level than it is at the secondary level. The number of students who have any contact at all with economics during their college career is exceedingly low. Among teacher trainees approximately 35 per cent of all colleges in the U.S. do not require economics.[8] In North Dakota the picture is not substantially different.

Table 5 summarizes the results of a survey undertaken during the early part of 1971. In January, 1971, 32 questionnaires were sent to eight colleges and universities which were providing teacher certification in North Dakota. Of these, 22 or nearly 70 per cent were returned although a few were incomplete and in a number of cases the respective college maintained no program in the field in question.

Four subject areas were chosen for investigation on the presumption that economics, if taught at all, would most likely be included in one of

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[8]Dawson, Ibid., p. 2.

the courses indicated in Table V. Economics is, of course, not listed since it is presumed that teachers who major or minor in economics would be well prepared to teach economic concepts. Generally, economic concepts, if considered, must be taught in some subject or curricular area other than the formal course, since the formal course is rarely offered. This would most likely be in the social studies area but, desirably, also in business education, history, and home economics.

The author has implicitly assumed that the majority of high school teachers involved with the courses being examined actually graduated from North Dakota schools. Conceivably, there could be a large number of teachers from Minnesota colleges, given the proximity of large school systems in Grand Forks and Fargo to Minnesota institutions. However, through observing a large number of transcripts, this appeared not to be the case; and even so, there is little reason to believe that the relevant Minnesota colleges and universities are doing a substantially better job at economic education.

According to available data during the period from 1965-1970, each reporting collegiate institution graduated approximately 65-80 teachers in the area of social studies. In 50 percent of the cases, a minimal background of 6-9 hours was required. The remaining 50 percent did not even require the minimum, and one required no economics at all. This certainly helps to explain the poor economics background maintained by teachers of Problems of Democracy.

In the other subject areas covered in the survey, the level of training appears even less. Although four institutions in the state graduated a large number of business education teachers, none require as much as six hours of economics. Most students, however, were exposed to at least one course in economics.

TABLE 5

Economics Preparation of High School Teachers by Colleges and Universities in North Dakota, Selected Fields, 1965-70

	INSTITUTIONS							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
SOCIAL STUDIES								
Majors	N.A	N.A.	75*	65*	83	N.A.	N.A.	64
Hours Required (Econ)	8	N.A.	3	3	0	N.A.	9	9
No. completing at least one course	All	N.A.	All	All	N.A.	N.A.	All	All
BUSINESS EDUCATION								
Majors	240	241	200*	N.P	N.P.	N.P.	150	N.A.
Hours Requires (Econ)	2	0	3	N.P.	N.P.	N.P.	3	N.A.
No. completing at least one course	All	181	All	N.P.	N.P.	N.P.	All	N.A.
HISTORY								
Majors	0	N.A.	N.P.	N.A.	N.A.	40	800*	122
Hours Required (Econ)	4	N.A.	N.P.	N.A.	N.A.	3-4	3	3
No. completing at least one course	All	N.A.	N.P.	N.A.	N.A.	35	All	All
HOME ECONOMICS								
Majors	N.A.	N.P.	N.P.	626	N.P.	N.P.	N.A.	N.A.
Hours Required (Econ)	N.A.	N.P.	N.P.	2	N.P.	N.P.	3	N.A.
No. completing at least one course	N.A.	N.P.	N.P.	550*	N.P.	N.P.	All	N.A.

N.A. - Not available
N.P. - No program
* - Approximated

The returns in the history category were below average, but apparently there is only one institution in the state graduating substantial numbers of history majors. Although all these majors were exposed to one course in economics, none was required to complete more. In all probability, few did. The Home Economics program in the state is apparently also concentrated in only one institution. The situation in this case is similar to that of history, i.e., most students completed one course in economics.

It is not known how many students may have elected to enroll in additional courses in economics. It is conceivable that a considerable number may have completed further work in order to comply with minimal state standards for teaching economics. However, this would only be true for those who planned to teach a formal course in economics.

Concluding Observations

Given the conditions necessary for teacher preparation in economics in college level institutions in North Dakota, pragmatically one cannot expect the level of teacher competence in economics to be substantially different than that indicated earlier in the study. Moreover, in an age of academic specialization, it is unlikely that this problem will voluntarily improve. Regarding the availability of well trained teachers, large scale high schools have the edge, not only in terms of funds, but also in terms of broadened and more specialized curricula. In the smaller high schools where curricula are more general, there is less regard for hiring a teacher with a major in economics than there would be for a social studies major. Very simply, the social studies major is more available and also more functional. Most high schools in North Dakota are small; some very small. The implications are that there is little concern for economics as a discipline, and that therefore, economic concepts are not being taught.

This points to the importance of the national movement for economic education, including the Joint Council on Economic Education and its affiliated state councils. The aids supplied by such organizations will likely prove to be the only ones available for a very large number of school systems in the nation and, in particular, in North Dakota.

The North Dakota Council on Economic Education (NDCEE) is established primarily for the purpose of furthering the inclusion of economic concepts at all levels of instruction, K-12. This is to be accomplished by offering teachers opportunities to further develop their background in economics. Workshops and seminars will be offered in institutions throughout the state of North Dakota. Teachers will also have the opportunity to attend periodic conferences highlighted by curriculum specialists on economic education.

North Dakota schools also have an opportunity to become associated with the Council's Developmental Economic Education Program (DEEP). In cooperation with the Joint Council on Economic Education, the NDCEE is prepared to directly help individual schools to include economic concepts in their curricula.

In addition, the NDCEE is concerned with furthering the development of the elementary college course, maintaining a curriculum library for high school teachers, developing curriculum materials for public school usage, as well as other services which can be of considerable value to improving economic education in North Dakota. The NDCEE hopes to make an important contribution toward upgrading the status of economic education in North Dakota.

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